

VZCZCXYZ0003
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0320/01 0381255
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071255Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6499
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000320

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/07/2020
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ARMY INTERVENTION IN SALAH AL-DIN "GOVERNOR"
DISPUTE LOCKS OUT PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary A. Grappo for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: At the request of PM Maliki, DPM Rafi, e al-Issawi is attempting to mediate a resolution to the three-month-long dispute over the seating of the Salah ad-Din (SAD) governor-elect. The Iraqi Army has blocked all access to the Provincial Government building in Tikrit since January 21, making it impossible for local officials to issue salary and welfare payments, or conduct normal business. A majority in the Provincial Council is holding firm in demanding that the Presidency Council in Baghdad issue the necessary decree to ratify the election and allow the seating of the new governor. The Iraqi Islamic Party, however, is blocking the decree at the national level and has enlisted Maliki's support. Both sides appear intransigent; there is concern that there may be public demonstrations in SAD next week. Issawi plans to engage SAD council members in an effort to strike a deal within the next few days. Ambassador urged PM Maliki and MOI Bolani to withdraw the IA from the SAD government building in order to end the appearance that Baghdad is misusing the IA to address an internal political dispute that thus far has been non-violent; GEN Odierno has done likewise with PM Maliki and other senior security officials. End Summary.

CONTINUING STANDOFF LEADS TO RISING TENSIONS

¶2. (C) On February 2, DPM Issawi told PolCouns that PM Maliki had asked him to broker a resolution to the stand-off between the SAD Provincial Council (PC) and the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) over the seating of Governor-elect Khalid Hassan Mahdi Salih. Issawi's intervention follows the February 1 mediation visit to SAD by Minister of Interior (MOI) Jawad al-Bolani. SAD PC leaders told PRToff that Bolani spelled out for the PC majority that, although they had the law on their side in their removal of the former governor and the election of his replacement, the IIP was using its influence in the Council of Representatives (COR) in Baghdad to thwart their actions. According to Issawi, the IIP was adamant that, since the governor ousted by the PC in September 2009 belonged to IIP, his replacement should be an IIP member or the party should receive the PC Chair position.

¶3. (C) Earlier on February 2, SAD PC Chair Ahmed Abdullah Abid Khalaf (Abu Mazin) told PolCouns that the PC majority had no interest in a deal with the IIP on this issue. He bluntly stated that the PC had followed the letter of the law when it elected a new governor and that it would accept no resolution except one that honored the vote of the PC. Abu Mazin said the most immediate problem was that the Iraqi Army (IA), under the direction of PM Maliki, had prevented anyone from entering the main Provincial Government building in Tikrit since January 21, following the removal of former governor Mutashar al-Ilaiwee from the official gubernatorial residence by the IA and police. PolCouns asked, and Abu Mazin agreed, that he and other PC leaders would not organize or encourage demonstrations pending discussions with Issawi.

(Note: There is currently an Acting Governor in SAD; no challenges have been raised about his authority. Nevertheless, he is also being barred from the building. End Note.)

¶4. (C) On February 3, the Governor-elect Khalid told PolCouns and PRT Salah ad-Din TL that the Army "blockade" of the Provincial Government building was creating enormous difficulties by impeding the provision of basic services and Qdifficulties by impeding the provision of basic services and preventing social welfare payments to over 40,000 persons, as well as stopping salary payments to provincial government workers. He said public pressure was building and that while he and other officials would try to keep public reactions under control, demonstrations could erupt if there was no resolution to the impasse. Khalid stressed that it was therefore very important to find a solution to this dispute as soon as possible.

¶5. (C) The standoff over the seating of the governor-elect began over three months ago with the failure of the Presidency Council to issue a decree ratifying the October 27, 2009 election of the new governor by the SAD PC. By law, the Council is to issue such a decree within 15 days of the election. The Presidency Council Chief of Staff told Poloff in December that the Council was withholding the decree upon the request of COR Speaker Iyad al-Samarrai,e (IIP). Statements by Bolani and Issawi confirm that the IIP national leadership intends to continue to block the decree until a resolution is found that satisfies the IIP's demands.

A CHALLENGING MEDIATION

¶6. (C) In a follow-up meeting on February 4, Issawi told PolCouns that the PM intended for the IA to continue blocking access to the SAD Provincial Government building until the governor dispute was resolved. Issawi said he and Bolani had criticized the PM,s use of the army for this purpose during a recent Cabinet meeting and recommended that it end. (Note: Bolani confirmed this to the Ambassador on February 3. End Note.) Issawi planned to travel to SAD on February 7 to foster a resolution at that time. (Note: In a change of plans, Issawi met with SAD PC members in Baghdad on February ¶7. End Note.) He remarked, following a phone call with an IIP official that he took during the meeting with PolCouns, that the IIP remained intransigent in its demands, which he characterized as unreasonable since the IIP only held five of the 28 SAD PC seats. He also acknowledged that the PC majority had the law on its side regarding the legality of their election of the new governor. PolCouns cautioned that the PC majority appeared steadfast in its position and that there seemed to be no appetite for "backroom bargaining" over who held senior governmental positions. (Note: SAD PC member Abdullah Hussein Jebara told PRToffs that on the evening of February 3, Issawi had proposed to him, the PC Chair and the Acting Governor that he (Jebara) become governor and IIP hardliner Ammar Yousef Hammoud become the PC Chair. The SAD PC members reportedly rejected the proposal out of hand. End Note.) Irrespective of the state of the political negotiations, she stressed, the GOI should remove the IA from the government building to end the perception that Baghdad was misusing the IA to address a domestic political dispute that thus far was non-violent and did not, at this time, threaten to become violent. She noted that the Ambassador and GEN Odierno had strongly underscored to PM Maliki, MOI Bolani, and other senior security officials the need to remove the IA from the situation immediately.

THE SPEAKER GIVES HIS VIEW

¶7. (C) In a lengthy February 4 meeting with Pol M/C, COR Speaker Samarrai,e crystallized the depth of the IIP opposition to the current PC majority, and in particular to the PC Chair. He contended that this was a political dispute between two tribal groupings and that a solution was needed that would maintain the same "political consensus," otherwise

tensions could dramatically escalate. He accused PRT officers in SAD of "standing with one side over the other" and said the Embassy should stop interfering in what is a "political matter." Pol M/C countered that the Embassy sought to have the rule of law respected and was not supporting a particular party; neither was the Embassy seeking to help choose the PC Chair or the governor. Sharing his view on the way forward, Samarraie asserted that the leaders of both sides (i.e., the PC Chair and the former governor) needed to be removed from the equation to allow a fresh start with a new governor and a new PC Chair.

HILL